Met Office forecasts for the world's oldest air race

15 September 2016 - For the first time, the Met Office is providing weather forecasts for the UK team competing in the Gordon Bennett Gas Balloon Race.

Met Office weather forecasts will offer the UK team competing in the Gordon Bennett Gas Balloon Race the leading edge whilst helping to ensure the safety of the crew. The International Gordon Bennett Gas Balloon Race is the oldest air race in the world and takes off on Friday night 16 September from Gladbeck in Germany. The winner is the team who flies the furthest distance from the launch site. The teams can spend up to 4 days in a small wicker basket suspended under a hydrogen-filled gas balloon.

It is the first time the Met Office has provided consultative advice to contenders of this event. We will offer an initial weather briefing, followed by an analysis of the weather conditions hundreds of feet up, along the likely flight routes. There will also be regular briefings via satellite phone to the crew during the flight to help alert the team to any hazardous weather whilst also helping identify and exploit the strongest winds to gain competitive advantage whilst also alerting the team to any hazardous weather.

The gas balloons are controlled by releasing gas to go down and throwing out sand to go up. The pilots stand in a small wicker basket equipped with flight instruments, radios, food and warm clothing as flights can last 4-5 days in this confined and inhospitable space. The pilots take it in turns to have short sleeps and rest periods.

John Rose and Clive Bailey are one of two teams representing Team GB. Clive said: "The Gordon Bennett is one of the most exciting of races, it is a huge mental and physical challenge as we try to work out the best tracks for us to fly the furthest in the shortest possible time as the gas and sand can soon run out! We are very privileged to have the Met Office working closely with us and they are providing us with up to date weather information and a dedicated team of expert meteorologists to help guide us though the flight which is crucial to our success."

Nigel Gait, Head of Regulated Aviation at the Met Office said "We are delighted to have been chosen to provide consultative advice for the Gordon Bennett Cup. There is no doubt that our meteorologists will offer invaluable guidance to help John and Clive during their flight".

The last time a British team won was in 2008 with David Hempleman-Adams and Jon Mason flying from Albuquerque when they flew 1194 miles in 4 days. This is the 60th Gordon Bennett Gas Balloon Race and this year there are 24 teams representing 12 countries.

All photographs courtesy of FAI Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett.

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